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SUMMARY RECORD OF THE FIRST PART* OF THE 77th MEETING

Chairman: Mr. OSELLA (Argentina)
(Vice-Chairman)

Chairman of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions: Mr. MSELLE

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* The summary record of the second part of the meeting, to be reconvened on Monday, 19 September 1994, appears as document A/C.5/48/SR.77/Add.1.

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In the absence of Mr. Hadid (Algeria), Mr. Osella (Argentina), Vice-Chairman, took the Chair.

The meeting was called to order at 10.35 a.m.

AGENDA ITEM 123: PROGRAMME BUDGET FOR THE BIENNIUM 1994-1995 (continued)

Programme budget implications of draft resolution A/48/L.63/Rev.2 concerning agenda item 40 (A/48/7/Add.17; A/C.5/48/84)

1. Mr. MSELLE (Chairman of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions) introduced the Advisory Committee's report in document A/48/7/Add.17, which reflected the Committee's consideration of the Secretary-General's statement of programme budget implications in document A/C.5/48/84. If adopted, the draft resolution before the plenary Assembly would establish a human rights verification mission in Guatemala. The parameters governing the mission had been outlined in a report of the Secretary-General (A/48/985), which the Advisory Committee had examined in conjunction with the Secretary-General's statement (A/C.5/48/84).

2. The Secretary-General had proposed expenditure totalling $16.3 million, of which $8.4 million related to personnel costs, while the balance of $7.9 million related to operational costs. Those estimates related to human rights issues; there were other agreements, regarding which the Secretary-General had informed the Committee that he intended to seek the Security Council's approval (for a peace-keeping operation and the establishment of a special account), as indicated in paragraph 4 of the Advisory Committee's report. On the basis of the Secretary-General's report in document A/48/985 and information provided orally by the representative of the Secretary-General, the estimates in the statement of the Secretary-General were based on a preliminary survey mission. The Advisory Committee had concluded that there was room to formulate a much more precise and accurate operational plan for the mission. The Advisory Committee had been informed that once the draft resolution before the plenary Assembly had been adopted, there would be a further mission to Guatemala for the purpose of, inter alia, concluding a status-of-mission agreement. The Advisory Committee had requested that, once such an agreement had been concluded, the provision of assistance from host Governments be explored.

3. The Advisory Committee had requested that the number, grade and function of the proposed staff and resources for the mission be reviewed in the manner indicated in its report; the Committee also believed that there might be a possibility of increasing the number of volunteers serving with the mission, thereby leading to a slight reduction in personnel costs.

4. The Committee was also concerned with what it perceived as an overestimate of costs for computers and vehicles, and recommended a lower number in paragraph 13 of its report. The Committee noted that the Secretary-General had transferred to the mission equipment and a number of vehicles valued at $2,560,600, and discussed the Secretary-General's proposal to include $2.6 million in the cost of the mission as a credit to the sending missions

(Mr. Mselle)

(largely ONUSAL). In its discussion of the topic, the Committee recalled General Assembly resolution 48/240 B (on ONUMOZ) and decision 48/496. When the matter was being discussed during the formal session of the Fifth Committee in July of 1994, the view had been expressed that the transfer of assets from one mission to another should result in the crediting of the sending mission with the equivalent value of the assets transferred, a variation from the procedure currently in place. The General Assembly had requested a feasibility study of such a procedure. The Advisory Committee had concluded in the report now before the Fifth Committee that pending receipt of the report of the Secretary-General and action on it by the General Assembly, the current procedure of not crediting the sending mission should be maintained. He (Mr. Mselle) had just noted in the advance copy of the report on the financing of the United Nations Assistance Mission for Rwanda (UNAMIR) that the current procedure, whereby the sending mission was not credited for any assets transferred, was maintained. The Committee had therefore recommended that, for the time being, the amount of $2,560,600 should not be included in the commitment authorization being recommended by the Advisory Committee. However, should the General Assembly decide in 1994 to codify the procedure outlined in the Secretary-General's statement (A/C.5/48/84), then it would be necessary to credit the sending missions with the value of the assets transferred.

5. The Advisory Committee was recommending that a commitment authority of no more than $12.9 million should be approved under section 4 of the programme budget for 1994-1995, but the actual appropriations and assessment needed would be considered in the context of the performance report for the biennium 1994-1995, which was to be submitted to the General Assembly later in 1994. He stressed again that the $12.9 million was an actual calculation reflecting the deletion of $2.5 million recommended by the Advisory Committee, as well as the reduced amounts for computers and vehicles.

6. Mr. SHARP (Australia) requested that an advance copy of the UNAMIR budget be made available to all members of the Fifth Committee.

7. Mr. STITT (United Kingdom) said it was fundamentally unacceptable that the General Assembly was being asked to make potentially long-term commitments involving considerable sums of money on the basis of the meagre information provided in the Secretary-General's statement of programme budget implications and the Advisory Committee's report, which had been made available in the various languages only a few hours before the meeting. Delegations had been unable to seek instructions from their Governments. The current political context notwithstanding, it was unacceptable that the role entrusted to the Fifth Committee under the rules of procedure of the General Assembly should be so depreciated. Furthermore, it was surprising that there had been no oral introduction of the Secretary-General's statement of programme budget implications. That the role of the Committee was being taken lightly caused his delegation deep concern.

8. Mr. TAKASU (Controller), responding to the question concerning the advance copy of the report on the financing of UNAMIR, said that owing to the urgency of the matter, it had been agreed that the Advisory Committee would review the

(Mr. Takasu)

UNAMIR budget on the basis of an advance copy in one language only. General distribution of the advance copy was not permitted. In the past, interested delegations had obtained advance copies of certain reports, but the practice was not to have reports translated into all languages and circulated when they were still in draft form.

9. In response to the question concerning the timing and content of statements of programme budget implications, he said that the Secretariat was guided by the rules of procedure of the General Assembly. The Secretariat had started work on a statement of programme budget implications as soon as it had received an advance copy of draft resolution A/48/L.63/Rev.2. It had done its best to comply with the rule requiring a statement of programme budget implications to be circulated within 48 hours of the submission of a draft resolution. The procedure in such cases was different from that followed for revised estimates or reports on the financing of peace-keeping operations, because the estimates of expenditure required under rule 153 of the rules of procedure were submitted in response to draft resolutions submitted by Member States. Wishing to avoid any criticism for delay, the Secretariat had worked on the basis of information collected by the advance team that had visited Guatemala and had tried to provide the best estimate in the circumstances.

10. Mr. SHARP (Australia) said that he understood the informal agreement between the Secretariat and the Advisory Committee to which the Controller had referred. However, in the interest of openness and accountability in the budgetary process, any informal arrangement regarding the distribution of advance reports to the Advisory Committee should be extended to the members of the Fifth Committee as well.

11. Mr. MSELLE (Chairman of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions) said that an advance copy of the UNAMIR report could be made available if delegations which used other languages did not object. However, advance copies of documents submitted to the Advisory Committee were often revised many times, which could present problems.

12. Mr. BOIN (France) said that his delegation was absolutely opposed to the circulation of documents in only one language because there were six official languages of the United Nations.

13. The CHAIRMAN invited delegations to comment on the Advisory Committee's recommendation that the Secretary-General be authorized to enter into commitments not exceeding $12.9 million for the establishment of a human rights mission in Guatemala.

14. Mr. MÜNCH (Germany), supported by Mr. STITT (United Kingdom) and Mr. MADDENS (Belgium), said that some delegations, including his own, needed more time to contact their Governments and proposed that the meeting be temporarily suspended.

The meeting was suspended at 11.05 a.m. and resumed at 12 noon.

15. Mr. MÜNCH (Germany), speaking on behalf of the European Union, emphasized the importance the Union attached to the aims of draft resolution A/48/L.63/Rev.2, which its members had sponsored. The European Union was, however, able to support only some of the ACABQ recommendations. It agreed that the budget and proposed staffing levels were excessive. Better use should be made of the capabilities of the United Nations system, in particular those of UNDP and other agencies which had the expertise and means to promote the objectives of the mission and the human rights coordination mechanism. It also agreed that participation by the host country in the operation should be sought and should be reflected in the budget proposal.

16. The European Union therefore requested the Secretary-General to submit revised estimates by 30 November 1994 which would take duly into account the concerns regarding the level of the appropriation and absorption capacity. It also requested him to establish a trust fund for the mission. The European Union did not share the Advisory Committee's opinion, expressed in paragraph 9 of its report (A/48/7/Add.17), concerning the posts of resident auditor and management review officer. While its sponsorship of the draft resolution clearly indicated its support for the role of the mission, the European Union regretted that it could accept a commitment authority of only $6 million through the end of 1994. Continuing to grant the authority to commit funds without adequate financial resources being available could be detrimental to the cash flow situation of the Organization.

17. Mrs. SHEAROUSE (United States of America) said that her delegation regretted that it could not endorse the position of the European Union. It supported the recommendations contained in the report of ACABQ.

18. Mr. GOKHALE (India) said that paragraph 6 of the Secretary-General's statement of programme budget implications (A/C.5/48/84) mentioned that allowance had been made for the transfer of some equipment from other missions to the new mission in Guatemala, and that the corresponding payments to those missions was estimated at $2.5 million. General Assembly decision 48/496 had requested the Secretary-General to study the feasibility of a procedure in accordance with which assets would be redeployed from one peace-keeping operation to another only after the value of the assets had been determined and a provision made, in the budget of the receiving operation, to reimburse the special account of the operation providing the assets. He drew attention to that request in view of the continuing delays in reimbursing troop-contributing countries. Any draft resolution should take into account the Secretary-General's proposals. If the General Assembly were to approve such a procedure, the Secretary-General should thereafter make adequate provision for such payments.

19. Mr. DAMICO (Brazil) agreed with the European Union that a trust fund for voluntary contributions should be established. He did not agree, however, that the aims of the draft resolution could be achieved by assigning responsibility for implementing it to existing United Nations agencies. For that reason, his delegation favoured establishing a specific mission for that purpose, as provided for in the draft resolution. His delegation endorsed the recommendations of ACABQ.

20. Mr. JADMANI (Pakistan) said that troop-contributing countries attached great importance to the reimbursement of costs. If equipment was to be transferred between missions, the concerns of those countries must be taken into account. His delegation supported the observations of the representative of India.

21. Mr. JU Kuilin (China) said that his delegation was concerned that the estimated requirements could not be absorbed in the current budget, and would welcome clarification from the Secretariat as to how the implementation of approved programmes would be affected.

22. Mr. BIVERO (Venezuela) said that the recommended appropriation would provide the necessary flexibility for the effective functioning of the proposed mission, which was of great urgency and political importance to Latin America.

23. Mr. ORLOV (Russian Federation) said that, although the concerns raised by Germany on behalf of the European Union seemed well founded, the course of action it proposed could be counterproductive. Respect for existing procedures must be guaranteed. His delegation supported the recommendations of ACABQ.

24. Mrs. RODRIGUEZ (Cuba) said that her delegation could not support the German proposal that UNDP should participate in the mission. It supported the recommendations of ACABQ.

25. Mrs. INCERA (Costa Rica) said that the Advisory Committee's recommendations provided the Secretary-General with the necessary flexibility in deploying the operation.

26. Mr. GJESDAL (Norway) said that his delegation agreed with the views expressed by the United States and Venezuela.

27. Ms. PEÑA (Mexico) said that her delegation was not in a position to take a decision on the matter, particularly with regard to the role of UNDP, before consulting with the Mexican authorities.

The meeting was suspended at 12.20 p.m.